



# The Server *Handbook*

*Everything you need to know to walk onto our floor and make a guest feel like an old friend. Hospitality, the menu, the fire, the list, and how we do it here.*

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

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# Welcome, *friend*.

*You're about to work on the floor of a restaurant that wants to get the details right for every guest, every night. Not in a showy way — in a quiet, consistent, take-care-of-people way. This book is how. Read it slowly. We wrote it for you.*

## WHAT THIS BOOK IS

# *The shortest answer to every question you'll have on the floor.*

This handbook is the closest thing we have to a brain. It is where we wrote down what we believe about hospitality, what we want guests to feel, what we serve and why, how to talk about our wine, what to do when something goes sideways, and — yes — the boring stuff like time clocks and where to park.

If you're holding this on your first day, welcome. If you've worked here a year and pulled it off the shelf to settle a debate about whether the Josper temperature is 600 or 700 degrees, also welcome (and yes, you'll find the answer in here).

The whole document takes about an hour to read. Read it once cover to cover before your first shift. Then read the chapter that matches whatever happened that night, before you come back the next one. Hospitality is not an instinct you arrive with. It's a habit you build. This book is the scaffolding.

## A SMALL CONFESSION

There are things in here we will probably want to change in a year. The dishes will rotate. The wine list will rotate. The chef may want to add a new pre-shift ritual. That's fine and that's the point — this book is a living document. The values are permanent. The tactics adapt.

## HOW TO USE IT

# *Eight chapters. One pre-shift tradition.*

The chapters move from the abstract to the concrete. We start with why Old Friend exists, then the people behind it, then how we cook, then how we pour, then how we serve, then how we handle the hard moments, then the operations, then the things we measure. The closing is a short letter from the chef.

At every Tuesday pre-shift, we read one passage from this book together — out loud, by a different server each week. It only takes two minutes. It's how we keep the language in our mouths.

*A good restaurant teaches the kitchen. A great one  
teaches the floor.*

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# What *Old Friend* is.

*Every restaurant has a posture. Some restaurants stand stiff. Some sprawl across you. We lean in like an old friend who has saved a seat. That word in our name is a promise — it tells guests what to expect and tells you what to give them. Everything else in this book is downstream of it.*

#### THE SHAPE OF THE ROOM

## *86 seats, one fire, every night different.*

Old Friend lives at 166 E. Lancaster Avenue in Wayne, PA — the heart of Philadelphia's Main Line, in a 2,887-square-foot space designed by Stokes Architecture. The room is built around an open kitchen with a Jospier charcoal oven at its visible center. The fire is not theater. It is the way we cook.

We seat 86 — 78 in the dining room and 8 at the bar. Service runs Tuesday through Sunday, beginning at 5 PM. We close Monday so everyone has a day off that isn't a weekend. The bar holds open until 11 PM on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and until 10 PM the other nights. Reservations live on Resy. We do not take OpenTable.

The average guest spends about \$100 with us. The cheaper ones spend \$65 and feel cared for. The bigger ones spend \$250 and feel like they got more than they paid for. The dollar amount is not what we manage to. The feeling is.

#### THE MISSION

## *To be the restaurant Main Line guests bring their best friends to.*

That's the whole sentence. We are not the restaurant for a stiff first date or a corporate quarterly. We are where you take the friend you love and want to feed. Everything we do is calibrated to that table.

And beneath that, quietly: we do it the same way every night. The same care at every table, the same standard on every plate, the same warmth at the door on a slow Tuesday as on a full Saturday. Guests feel that consistency even when they can't name it, and it is what turns a first visit into an old friendship. We are not chasing anything. We are taking care of people.

#### THE VALUES

## *Five things that decide every close call.*

### **Hospitality is the work. The food is the medium.**

We do not serve food. We serve people, using food. Every interaction either deposits trust into the relationship or withdraws from it. There is no neutral.

## **The fire tells the truth.**

The Josper does not lie. A dish either has crust and smoke and life in it, or it doesn't. We bring the same honesty to everything else — wine recommendations, dietary conversations, what's good tonight. We don't bullshit guests. They can feel it.

## **The list is small on purpose.**

Our wine list is 30 bottles plus four miscellany. Our menu is tight. We could double either, but we choose not to. The discipline of a small list is what makes everything on it deserve its place.

## **The room is the family.**

Servers, cooks, dishwashers, hosts, bartenders, prep — we eat together, we sweep together, we win and lose together. There is no upstairs and downstairs here. If a dishwasher walks past you with a tray, take it.

## **The details are the work.**

We sweat the small things because guests feel them: the warm plate, the full glass, the name remembered. High standards, kept every night, are how we care for people.

### **THE ONE-LINE VERSION**

Treat every guest like the friend you saved a seat for, cook with fire, pour with care, and don't be precious about any of it.

# The *people* behind it.

*The chef. The owner. The team. You will work side by side with all of them — sometimes in the same minute. Know their stories. They are the answer to half the questions guests will ask you.*

## THE CHEF

### *Sam Henzy. Our chef.*

Chef Sam Henzy grew up in Delaware. He came to Old Friend from Fork in Old City, where he spent two years as executive chef. Before that, Middle Child. Before that, Vernick, Noma in Copenhagen, and Quince and Angler in San Francisco.

His live-fire work started at Noma, where he found a Jospers set up in a makeshift shack behind the restaurant and decided on the spot that it would be his station. He spent the last three months of a six-month internship on it. He went to Vernick partly for the wood oven. At Angler he was executive sous chef on a line with no conventional stoves at all. In his words, “it’s fires everywhere you look.”

At Old Friend he runs the kitchen: the team, the menu, and the food that comes off the hearth. The fire isn’t a gimmick. It’s how he cooks.

### **What that means for you, on the floor**

When a guest asks “who is the chef?”, you have a real answer, and a good story: the Jospers in a shack behind Noma that Sam claimed as his station. When he comes out of the kitchen to greet a regular, it is not for show.

If a guest is excited to meet him, find him. If he is in the middle of a fire, tell the guest you’ll bring him over when service settles, and then actually do it.

#### OUR CONSULTING CHEF

### *Chef Joe Monnich.*

Joe grew up on the Main Line, trained at the Culinary Institute of America, and worked under Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Jean-Marie Lacroix before running Dandelion and Parc, two of the busiest kitchens in Philadelphia. He is the chef-owner of Stove & Co. He developed the Old Friend concept, assembled the operating team and brought Chef Sam to the project. Through the opening months he works the line alongside Sam and mentors the sous chef, then stays on as a consultant to the owners.

#### THE OWNERS

### *Larry and Chas. Old friends, for real.*

Old Friend is owned by Larry Kagan and Chas McFeely. They met in 1984 at Welsh Valley Middle School and went through Harriton High together. In the mid-80s they worked as busboys at Al E. Gators on Lancaster Avenue in Bryn Mawr, close to where they grew up, where the Lexus dealership stands now. Since then their friendship has lasted through college and early careers, and stayed strong after Chas moved across the country to San Francisco. It has seen kids born, milestone birthdays and the loss of parents. When Chas turned 40, Larry flew to San Francisco for one day just to be there. Chas is an uncle to Larry's kids, and Larry is an uncle to Chas's son, Charlie. As Larry puts it, an old friend is "someone between friend and family — someone you can pick up at any time, you can be yourself."

The name comes from that friendship, but it isn't only about them. It is a challenge to us: to become an old friend to the people who eat here. It is a standard: every guest is treated like an old friend, whether it's their first visit or their fiftieth. And it is an invitation to our guests to make us one of theirs.

The company that owns the restaurant is Free Hugs, LLC. It's named after the painting by the bar, one of a series Chas dreamed up. He found old paintings, had trucker hats painted onto the people in them, and sold them in San Francisco to raise money for kids in need. You can see the whole series at [weirdcharity.com](http://weirdcharity.com).

Old Friend is its own thing. We are not part of Stove and Co. Every decision the owners make runs through this room. If a guest asks who owns the place, tell them the truth: *“Two friends who grew up right here and have been best friends for over forty years. Chef Sam Henzy runs our kitchen, and Chef Joe Monnich, who helped build Old Friend, consults with us.”*

#### YOUR TEAM

## A small group, deeply trained.

Our floor is intentionally small. On a typical service you will work alongside:

| ROLE                      | NUMBER | WHAT THEY DO                                                               |
|---------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>GM / Floor Manager</i> | 1      | Runs the floor. The person to find when something is going wrong or right. |
| <i>Servers</i>            | 4 – 5  | You. A ratio of about one server per seventeen covers.                     |
| <i>Bartenders</i>         | 1 – 2  | Build the cocktails, run the eight bar seats, support service bar.         |
| <i>Food runners</i>       | 2      | The bridge between the kitchen and the table. Faster than fast.            |
| <i>Host</i>               | 1      | The first face and the last. Owns the guest's first impression.            |
| <i>Sous chef</i>          | 1      | Chef Sam's right hand. The kitchen voice when Sam isn't on the line.       |
| <i>Line cooks</i>         | 3 – 4  | Hot, cold, pastry, garde manger. Each owns their station.                  |
| <i>Dishwasher(s)</i>      | 2      | The backbone. Treat them accordingly.                                      |

#### THE DISHWASHER RULE

If you walk past the dish pit with empty hands, pick something up. If a dishwasher is in the weeds, ask what they need. The kitchen flows through their station. When they fall behind, every plate behind every table slows.

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*The chef cooks. The dishwasher washes. The server connects. None of these jobs is more important than any other.*

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# The *fire*.

*The Josper is not a piece of equipment. It is the way we cook, and it deserves its own chapter. Once you understand what it does, you understand what most of the menu is trying to do, and you can talk about the food without faking it.*

## WHAT IT IS

# *A Josper CVJ-76, which is two grills having a conversation.*

A Josper is a Spanish charcoal oven. It looks like a stainless steel box with a heavy hinged door, and inside it is a bed of glowing lump charcoal — not gas, not wood chips, not a smoke generator. Real fire. Real charcoal.

Our specific unit is a Josper CVJ-76 from the Middleby company. The "CV" half is a closed charcoal oven: door shuts, heat builds, food gets a sear that no gas grill on earth can replicate. The "J" half is an open Basque grill in the same body, where the cook can adjust the food up and down over the embers by hand. One unit, two ways of cooking with fire.

## What it cooks like

The closed oven runs in the 500 to 700 degree range. The temperature is not for show — it's what lets a steak develop a crust in two minutes that you can't fake at 350. The open grill side gives the cook direct flame and direct distance control. You can hover a piece of fish six inches above coals, then drop it to three.

The result is food that smells different. A Josper-cooked thing has a smell that walks across the room and changes the mood. That is the smell of our restaurant.

**Why guests ask:** *"Is that real charcoal in there?" Yes. The cooks light it fresh every day — typically beginning around 1:30 in the afternoon — and it burns down to coals by 5 PM service. There is no propane assist. No gas burners. It is a fire we light and tend.*

## THE OTHER TOOLS

# *Combi, range, and cold prep — the supporting cast.*

The Josper is the centerpiece, but it isn't alone. The kitchen also runs a Rational iCombi Pro 6-Half combi oven — a precision steam-convection unit that does the long, slow work the Josper can't. The 48-hour short rib lives in the combi. Whole-fish gentle steaming, too. Many dishes start in the combi and finish on the Josper, which is how we get tender meat with a charred exterior.

There's also a Montague heavy-duty range with two hot tops for sauces, sides, pasta water, and reductions, and a cheesemelter overhead for finishing gratins and crusts. And there's a full cold-prep station for everything that never touches heat — crudo, salads, the steak tartare, the bread service.

## The code on the menu

Servers should be able to read the kitchen-side menu codes:

- **J** — Jospier charcoal oven or grill
- **C** — Rational combi oven
- **R** — HD range and hot tops
- **X** — Cold prep, no heat

Most of the menu is J. That is by design.

### TALKING ABOUT IT

## *How to describe the fire without making it weird.*

The wrong way to talk about the Jospier is to make it sound like a science experiment. The right way is to make it sound like the thing it is: a serious old technology, used seriously, in plain view of the dining room.

#### GUEST

*What's the deal with the open kitchen?*

#### YOU

*The big fire you can see — that's a Jospier charcoal oven. It's the Spanish-style charcoal grill at the center of our kitchen. Almost everything on the menu touches it. The cooks light it fresh every day, and that's where most of the smell in here is coming from.*

#### GUEST

*Is the steak grilled or smoked?*

#### YOU

*Grilled — but over real charcoal, in a closed oven that runs around 600 degrees. So you get the char of a grill but a deeper, smokier flavor than a gas grill could give. It's not smoked in the barbecue sense; it's seared by fire.*

IF YOU FORGET EVERY OTHER WORD

Three words always work: *charcoal, fire, fresh*. The Jospers cook with real charcoal. It is a real fire, not a gas grill. It is lit fresh every single day.

# The *menu*.

*You cannot recommend what you have not tasted. You cannot describe what you do not understand. This chapter is the framework for both — what we cook and why, and how to talk about it without ever sounding like you're reading a card.*

## THE ARCHITECTURE

# *Seven sections. About a hundred ideas. Roughly thirty live tonight.*

Our menu is organized in seven sections — snacks and bites, cold starters, hot starters, fish and shellfish, meat and poultry, vegetable mains, and dessert. On any given night a working menu pulls thirty or so from a developed library of about a hundred dishes that Chef Sam and the team have built, tested, and put through service.

That library rotates seasonally and by what arrives at the back door that week. If you've been here three months, you've seen things come and go and come back. That is intentional. We are a market-driven restaurant.

## THE SECTIONS

# *What each one is for, at the table.*

### **Snacks and bites**

Five to eight items, designed to start a table. Ember bread with cultured Keswick butter. Jospier-grilled oysters. Charred padróns. Charcoal-fired dates with guanciale. These are what you suggest while the table is figuring out what they want — small bites with maximum char and maximum hospitality. Cheap to add, big return on the experience.

### **Cold starters**

Crudo, tartare, charcuterie, the market salad. These come together fast at the cold station. Lighter ways to enter the meal. Great for guests who want something between a snack and a full starter.

### **Hot starters**

The most fun section of the menu, in our opinion. Charcoal-roasted mushrooms, charred octopus, grilled prawns, Jospier-roasted bone marrow.

This is where the kitchen shows off without making the guest commit to a whole entrée.

## Fish and shellfish

Almost all whole or center-cut, almost all on the Josper. The whole branzino. The grilled halibut. The lobster on the Josper. The charred octopus mains. This section is also where some of our most beautiful presentations live — the whole branzino comes to the table whole, and we filet it tableside.

## Meat and poultry

The heart of the Josper menu. The Josper NY strip from Hendricks Farms. The 45-day dry-aged charcoal ribeye. The 48-hour short rib (combi then Josper). The whole Josper chicken from Griggstown. Lamb chops al carbon. The 32-oz côte de boeuf for two — the table that orders this is the table you give the night to.

## Vegetable mains

This is the section guests remember, because most steakhouses dismiss it. We don't. The whole roasted cauliflower. The ember onion tarte tatin. The Josper celery root steak. These exist for vegetarians and they exist for everyone else as a way to slow the meal down and add a different texture.

## Dessert

Small. Honest. Char and chocolate and stone fruit and ice cream. The ember s'mores is a draw. The affogato bridges into the coffee program. We don't make twelve desserts. We make six that are perfect.

### HOW WE WANT YOU TO DESCRIBE FOOD

## *Three sentences. Two flavors. One verb.*

Servers who recite menus sound like servers. Servers who describe food sound like friends. The framework we use:

- One sentence on what the dish *is* — the protein, the cooking method, the heart of it.
- One sentence on two flavors you'll *actually taste* — never more than two.
- One verb-led sentence on what we'd *order with it*, or who it pairs with at the table.

### BAD

*The Josper NY strip is a sixteen-ounce dry-aged Hendricks Farms strip cooked on our charcoal oven with ember butter and bone marrow garnish over charred scallion.*

#### BETTER

*The strip is a sixteen-ounce dry-aged ribeye, finished on the Jospers. The ember butter melts into it and the marrow tastes like roasted bread. The table next to you tonight is sharing it with the grilled mushrooms.*

#### THE HARD QUESTIONS

## *Allergies, dietary needs, and the dish you don't love.*

### **Allergies are not a conversation. They are a flag.**

Any allergy goes straight to the kitchen, written on the ticket, before any other action. We don't say "I think that's fine." We say "let me confirm with the kitchen, give me one minute." Then we confirm. Chef Sam and the sous chef are the only authorities on what is or isn't safe. Anaphylaxis is not a place we improvise.

### **Dietary preferences are an invitation.**

A vegan, pescatarian, gluten-free, or dairy-free guest is not a problem. They are a chance to show what the kitchen can do. The market salad, the whole roasted cauliflower, the ember-roasted beets, the grilled fish — we can build a beautiful three-course experience for any of these. Suggest, don't apologize.

### **The dish you don't love.**

You will, occasionally, have a dish on the menu that doesn't speak to you. Do not steer a guest away from it. Steer them toward something you do love. There's a difference: "you might consider X instead" vs. "I'm not crazy about that one." Never the second sentence.

#### THE SIGNATURE DISHES

Six dishes you should know by heart and recommend without thinking: **Ember bread, Jospers-grilled oysters, Charred octopus mains, Jospers NY strip, Whole roasted cauliflower, Ember s'mores.** These are the dishes a new guest who walked in cold could order and walk out understanding the restaurant. They are the spine.

# The *wine*.

*Thirty bottles, four miscellany, two permanent Pennsylvania producers, an apex that rotates every quarter, and a by-the-glass program drawn straight from the list. The smallest serious wine program in the Main Line — and the one you'll talk about most.*

## THE TRIANGLE

### *Three tiers. Each one with a job.*

Our cellar holds exactly thirty bottles in active rotation — 15 reds and 15 whites — plus four miscellany positions (one non-vintage Champagne, one pét-nat, one dessert or fortified, one skin-contact orange). Adding any new bottle requires removing one. That discipline is the program.

The list is built as a triangle:

| TIER        | BOTTLES         | RANGE        | JOB                                                                                     |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Apex</i> | 3 red / 3 white | \$130 – 250+ | Celebration. The bottles a table remembers. Rotates quarterly.                          |
| <i>Mid</i>  | 7 red / 7 white | \$65 – 125   | Revenue engine. Where most tables live. Includes one PA producer in each color, always. |
| <i>Base</i> | 5 red / 5 white | \$48 – 64    | Welcome. Treated with the same seriousness as the apex.                                 |

## THE PENNSYLVANIA COMMITMENT

### *Two slots that never leave the list.*

In the Mid tier, one red and one white are permanently held for Pennsylvania producers. They rotate annually — the producer might change — but the commitment to the state never does. This is the Philly-native narrative made literal on the list, and it is one of the things guests ask about first.

The PA producers you'll likely see anchoring those slots: Galen Glen in the Lehigh Valley (Grüner and Riesling), Va La in Chester County (field blends from a single estate), Karamoor in Montgomery County (Bordeaux-style reds), Penns Woods in Chadds Ford, Pinnacle Ridge for sparkling.

## BY THE GLASS

### *Eight pours. Drawn from the list itself.*

The BTG program is not a separate, lesser list. The wines pouring by the glass tonight are the same wines on the list tonight. Three reds, three whites, one permanent

Champagne pour, and one rotating apex pour — typically opened with a Coravin so we can serve it by the glass without compromising the bottle.

That rotating apex pour is the move. A guest who has not committed to a \$200 bottle can try a \$52 glass and find out what a great Burgundy or a serious Barolo tastes like. Many of them then order a bottle. That is hospitality and economics meeting at the same point.

#### PAIRING — THE WORKING SET

## *What to suggest, when, with what.*

The full pairing logic lives in the wine program reference document. The shorter version, the version you need on the floor:

| DISH FAMILY                       | WHAT WORKS                     | WHY                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ember bread + snacks</i>       | NV Champagne or pét-nat        | Sparkling cuts the char and butter; opens the palate.                                                 |
| <i>Crudo and cold starters</i>    | Base or Mid white              | Bright, mineral wines for raw fish. Riesling, Grüner, Muscadet.                                       |
| <i>Hot starters with smoke</i>    | Mid white or light Mid red     | Pinot, lighter Italian reds, or a textured white can both handle it.                                  |
| <i>Whole fish on the Josper</i>   | Mid white with weight          | Burgundian Chardonnay, white Rhône, or a serious German Riesling.                                     |
| <i>Josper steaks &amp; ribeye</i> | Mid or Apex red                | Bordeaux blend, Northern Rhône syrah, Tuscan red. The Karamoor PA Bordeaux blend earns its spot here. |
| <i>Lamb &amp; gamey meats</i>     | Northern Rhône syrah / Spanish | Smoke loves smoke. Syrah's pepper and the lamb's char are made for each other.                        |
| <i>Vegetable mains</i>            | Mid white or skin-contact      | The orange wine in the miscellany position is brilliant with the cauliflower and the celery root.     |
| <i>Dessert</i>                    | Dessert/fortified miscellany   | Or a glass of NV Champagne — always works, always feels generous.                                     |

## THE CONVERSATION

# *Ask before you recommend.*

The single most important habit at the table is asking before recommending. The guest's budget, palate, and occasion are theirs to share, not yours to assume.

YOU

*Are you in the mood for something light and bright tonight, or something with a little more weight to it?*

GUEST

*Something with weight, I think.*

YOU

*Got it. Are you set on a particular style or budget, or would you like me to walk you through a couple of options at different price points?*

This is two questions. They take fifteen seconds. They are the difference between a recommendation that lands and one that doesn't.

## THE NO-SHAME RULE

A guest who orders the \$54 base bottle is not corrected, not upsold, not gently nudged. They are thanked, served, and treated with the exact same care as the \$250 table next to them. If you can't hold this, the program doesn't work. Guests feel this faster than anything else.

## POURING

# *Temperature, opening, pour size.*

- Reds at 60 – 65°F. Whites at 45 – 50°F. Sparkling at 42 – 45°F. If you're not sure, ask the bartender or the GM.
- Open in front of the guest. Present the label to the host. Cork on the table on a small folded napkin.
- Pour six ounces for the first glass, four for refills. A bottle should last the table the length of an entrée comfortably.
- Top off without being asked, but ask if you're not sure how the pacing is working.

*The recommendation you make at the table is the  
program speaking out loud.*

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# How we *serve*.

*Steps of service, the choreography of the floor, the things we do at every table, every night, the same way. Not because we're rigid — because consistency is what makes hospitality real.*

## THE PRE-SHIFT

# 5:00 PM, every day, no exceptions.

Pre-shift is the most important fifteen minutes of every service. We meet at the bar. Chef Sam (or the sous chef) walks us through the menu — what's new, what's 86'd, what is great tonight, what's nuanced. The GM walks us through the floor — VIPs, allergies on the books, large parties, special occasions.

One server reads a passage from this handbook out loud. It changes every week. Then we taste — a glass of the new BTG pour, a bite of a new dish, both if there's time.

~~4:00 PM~~ Servers arrive. Set the room. Check stations.

~~4:30 PM~~ Side work — polish glasses, fold napkins, run silverware.

~~5:00 PM~~ Pre-shift meeting at the bar. Fifteen minutes.

~~5:15 PM~~ Stations open. First reservation usually at 5:30.

## THE STEPS OF SERVICE

# The choreography that makes the night feel effortless.

| STEP                       | WINDOW             | WHAT                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Greet</i>               | ≤ 90 sec from sit  | Eye contact, name (yours), water preference (still / sparkling / tap), drink offer if natural. |
| <i>Cocktail / aperitif</i> | ≤ 4 min from greet | First drinks dropped or in motion. Tables move at the pace of the first drink.                 |
| <i>Menu walk-through</i>   | when guest signals | Two minutes max. Hit the format, the snacks, two signature dishes, and offer to help.          |
| <i>Order taken</i>         | when ready         | Read back. Confirm allergies in the same breath. Suggest wine here if not already chosen.      |
| <i>Wine to table</i>       | ≤ 5 min of order   | Present, open, pour. Top off without prompting through the first course.                       |
| <i>Snacks / cold</i>       | ≤ 7 min of order   | Snacks should land while the guest is still settling.                                          |

| STEP                    | WINDOW                          | WHAT                                                                             |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Hot starters</i>     | ≤ 12 min of order               | After clearing snacks. Pacing is the kitchen's call.                             |
| <i>Two-minute check</i> | 2 min after each course         | "How is everything?" — eye contact, real listening, leave if everything is good. |
| <i>Mains</i>            | when ready                      | Clear before mains. Refill wine. Crumb the table if needed.                      |
| <i>Dessert offer</i>    | ≤ 2 min after main plates clear | Always offer. Never assume. Mention the coffee program.                          |
| <i>Check</i>            | when guest signals or you sense | Pre-drop within two minutes of a clear signal. Never make them ask twice.        |
| <i>Goodbye</i>          | at the door                     | Walk them out if you can. By name if you got it.                                 |

#### THE LITTLE THINGS

## *The eight habits that separate good from great.*

- **The greet is within ninety seconds.** If the floor is slammed, walk by, make eye contact, hold up a finger. "I'll be right with you in one minute." That counts.
- **Use names.** If the reservation is under "Jenkins," learn it before you greet. If they introduce themselves, repeat it back. Names are the simplest hospitality.
- **Refill water without being asked.** But ask once before you start refilling sparkling — they may not want a second bottle.
- **Crumb the table before dessert.** Always. It's a small thing and they notice.
- **Pour the last splash.** When the wine is almost gone, empty the bottle into the glasses rather than leaving an inch in the bottle.
- **Take the order from the right when you can.** European convention. Feels more graceful.
- **Walk slowly with food. Walk faster without.** A runner with a hot plate sets the pace of the room.
- **The two-minute check is real.** Two minutes after the food drops, look at the table — really look — and ask. Don't ask from across the room.

## *Three traditions we never break.*

### **The hand-off.**

When you can't be in two places at once and a table needs something, find the GM or another server, look them in the eye, and hand off the task. "Table 14 needs another bottle of the Mid white. I'm in the middle of a turn. Will you grab them?" The other server says yes and does it. Don't make the guest wait.

### **The pre-meal allergy check.**

Before any food drops, every server confirms with the table once more: "Any allergies or restrictions I need the kitchen to know about?" Sometimes a guest forgets at the order. Catch it before the snacks arrive.

### **The last impression.**

Whoever closed the check escorts the table to the door. Hold it open. Thank them by name. Say "we hope to see you again, friend." If they're regulars, say it like you mean it. They will come back.

#### THE BAR (8 SEATS)

The bar at Old Friend is not a waiting area. It is the premium walk-in experience. The full menu is available. The bartender doubles as a host, a server, and a guide. If you're working the floor and you see a guest sitting at the bar alone, eating dinner — make sure they get the same level of attention they'd get at a four-top. Bar guests, treated well, are the most loyal regulars a restaurant has.

# When something *goes wrong.*

*Every service breaks somewhere. Wrong order, long wait, the kitchen 86'd a dish you already promised. How we handle the bad moments is what guests remember longer than the good ones. The framework is short and we use it without thinking.*

# Acknowledge. Apologize. Act. Appreciate.

This is the only framework you need to remember. Every recovery moment runs through it, every time.

## Acknowledge.

Name what happened. Out loud. "I'm so sorry — the kitchen 86'd the halibut and we should have caught it before you ordered." Do not pretend the thing didn't happen. Do not blame "the system." Acknowledge it as if you are the one who is responsible, because in that moment, you are.

## Apologize.

A real apology. Not a defensive one. "I'm sorry" — full stop. Not "I'm sorry but..." Never the word "but" in this sentence.

## Act.

Do something now. Not later. Bring an amuse from the kitchen. Comp the cocktail. Have the chef walk the dish out himself. Offer a different bottle from the same region. The act is the proof that the apology is real.

## Appreciate.

Thank them — sincerely — for their patience. Tell them you're glad they told you so you could make it right. Most guests will be more loyal after a well-handled problem than before it. The recovery is a chance to become indispensable.

### SCENARIO

*A four-top has been waiting forty minutes for their main courses and the kitchen is just plating them now.*

### YOU

*I owe you an honest apology — your mains have taken too long, and I should have come over sooner to update you. The chef is plating them now; they'll be at the table in under three minutes. In the meantime, I'd like to send you a glass of the new Champagne we're pouring this week, on the house — partly an apology, partly because it's about to be your favorite thing on the wine list. And thank you for your patience. It means a lot.*

## THE HARD ONES

# *What to do when it's not your fault.*

You will have nights when a guest is rude to you, or unfair, or sends back a dish that is exactly what they ordered, or has been drinking elsewhere before they arrived. The temptation is to defend yourself or push back. The discipline is to stay in the framework.

Apologize for the experience, not for what you did. "I'm sorry this isn't what you were hoping for" works in almost every scenario, even when the dish was correct. Then bring in the manager. The GM exists in part to take these moments off the floor.

## **When to bring the manager**

- Any time food comes back twice.
- Any time a guest raises their voice.
- Any time someone mentions a medical emergency, an allergic reaction, or a safety issue.
- Any time you sense the table will leave unhappy if it's only you fixing it.

## **When to comp something**

Servers are empowered to comp a glass of wine, a snack, or a dessert without asking. Anything larger — comped entrées, comped checks, gift card offers — goes through the GM. Use the smaller comps liberally. A free dessert at the right moment is the cheapest hospitality we have.

### THE 24-HOUR RULE

If a guest leaves visibly unhappy, the GM follows up within 24 hours — usually a personal email or call. Tell the GM. Don't try to handle the follow-up yourself. The point is to demonstrate that we cared enough to circle back.

## THE RECOVERY YOU'LL FORGET

# *The small one. The one before anyone notices.*

The best recovery happens before the guest knows there was a problem. If you spill water on a guest's napkin, replace it before they ask. If you bring the wrong side and

catch it mid-walk, turn around. If a runner sets a wine glass on the wrong side of the table, slide it across with the second pour.

Most servers think recovery is for the big stuff. Recovery is the muscle for the small stuff, used a hundred times a service, that keeps the big stuff from happening.

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*A guest who is rescued from a problem they barely noticed is the most loyal guest you will ever have.*

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# The *operations*.

*The boring stuff. The clocking in and the dress code and the parking and the phone policy. We promise to keep this chapter short. You only need it once a quarter, but it has to be in the book.*

## HOURS AND SCHEDULING

### *Tuesday through Sunday. Closed Monday.*

Service begins at 5 PM. The kitchen closes at 10 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday and at 10:30 PM Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The bar holds open another half hour after the kitchen closes on weekends.

Servers arrive at 4:00 PM unless otherwise scheduled. Pre-shift is at 5:00 PM. Stations open at 5:15.

The schedule comes out Wednesday for the next week. Ask the GM for time off at least two weeks ahead. To trade a shift, offer it in My Schedule; the GM approves it. Trades close at 3 PM the day before (3 PM Sunday for Tuesday shifts).

## DRESS & APPEARANCE

### *Quiet, well-fitted, clean.*

- Black or dark-charcoal pants or skirts. Black, dark, or white shirts (no graphics).
- Clean, closed-toe black shoes. No sneakers visible to guests. Comfort matters; pick what you can stand in for ten hours.
- An Old Friend apron (provided). Kept clean. A backup is in the office.
- Hair pulled back if it would fall into a guest's plate.
- Visible tattoos and piercings are fine. We are not a chain.
- No strong cologne or perfume. The fire is the only thing we want guests to smell.

## PHONES

### *Off the floor. On in the back.*

Phones live in your apron or your locker during service, on silent. Quick checks during a stand-down moment are fine in the back, never on the floor. If something is on fire at home, the GM has been delegated to receive emergency calls.

## TIPS & POOLING

### *Pooled house. Distributed weekly.*

Old Friend operates a pooled tip system across the front of house — servers, bartenders, runners, host. Cash and credit card tips both go into the pool. Distribution runs by points-by-role, set by ownership, and pays out weekly. The GM has the breakdown.

The kitchen is paid a living hourly wage that includes a tip-pool contribution distinct from FOH points. We do not tip out a per-shift dollar amount.

## FAMILY MEAL

### *4:30 PM, every day.*

The kitchen feeds the floor before service. Real food, cooked with the same care as anything we send out, often a dish Chef Sam is working on for the menu. Sit down. Eat. Talk to each other. This is the meal that makes the staff a family.

## SIDE WORK

### *Open and close lists, posted in the back.*

Every shift has open and close lists. They are not negotiable. The opening list takes 30 minutes; the close takes 45. The closing server signs off at the GM's desk before leaving. The next shift expects to walk into a polished room.

## THE LITTLE OPERATIONAL THINGS

- **Parking:** Staff parks in the back lot or on Louella Avenue. Never out front — those spaces are for guests.
- **Time clock:** Clock in within 5 minutes of arrival, out within 5 of leaving. Adjust mistakes with the GM the next day.
- **Pay:** Bi-weekly direct deposit. Pay stubs in your email.
- **Calling out:** Call the GM, do not text, at least three hours before service. Find your own coverage if you can.
- **Drinking on shift:** No. Off shift at the bar after close, in moderation, sure.
- **Friends and family at the bar:** Welcome, but you don't serve them yourself.

## *Every six months. Honest both ways.*

The GM and Chef Sam sit down with every team member every six months — twenty minutes, two-way. They tell you what you're great at and what to keep building. You tell them what's working, what isn't, and what would make this a better restaurant to work at. Feedback runs both directions. Bring it.

### THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS MOST

Staff turnover. We aim to keep it below 50% annualized — most restaurants live above 80%. Low turnover is how we get great. If something is off — schedule, pay, treatment, anything — tell us before you leave. We'd rather solve it.

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# One more thing, *friend*.

*Between the two of us, we have cooked at Noma, Vernick, Angler, Jean-Georges, Lacroix and Parc. We learned the most at the places where the cooks and the servers worked like one organism, where the dishwasher who walked past with a tray and lifted it onto a station, without being asked, was the same dishwasher you'd buy a beer for after close.*

*Old Friend is our chance to build that kitchen, and your chance to be on a floor that works the same way. You are not waiting tables. You are the public face of every choice we make about how to cook, what to source, how to pour. When you walk a plate of charcoal-grilled lamb chops to a table on a Tuesday night in February, you are the conclusion of a chain of decisions that started in a field in Lancaster County eighteen months earlier.*

*Take it seriously. Don't take yourself too seriously. Make people feel like they're with someone who's glad they're here, because you are. That's the whole job.*

— *Chef Sam Henzy & Chef Joe Monnich*